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TAGS: [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [MOPS](#) [KS](#)
SUBJECT: MND VM KIM BOASTS PROGRESS ON YONGSAN RELOCATION

Classified By: AMB. ALEXANDER VERSHBOW. REASONS 1.4 (b/d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: On February 13, ROK Vice Minister of National Defense, Kim Young-lyong, told the Ambassador that forward progress was being made on implementation of the Yongsan Relocation Plan (YRP). He said Minister of National Defense Kim Jang-soo had made implementation of YRP a priority, and that he (Vice Minister Kim) was now visiting the Pyongtaek construction area monthly to do all he could to help move the project along. VM Kim accurately predicted that the remaining 59 households occupying land on the future construction site would agree to the ROKG's relocation offer. He said both the Prime Minister and President Roh intended to visit the Pyongtaek area over the next six months to bless the project. The Ambassador thanked MND for taking ownership of YRP and urged that every effort be made to minimize delays in its completion. At VM Kim's request, the Ambassador offered to do what he could to arrange meetings for the Defense Minister with other high-level U.S. government officials when he travels to Washington to meet with Secretary Gates on February 23. END SUMMARY

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¶2. (C) South Korean Vice Minister of National Defense Kim Young-lyong briefed the Ambassador on the status of the Yongsan Relocation Plan (YRP) at breakfast meeting on February 13, 2007. Referencing an agreement reached at the 11th Security Policy Initiative (SPI) on ways to move forward with YRP implementation, VM Kim highlighted the following factors he said have given new momentum to the project:

-- Defense Minister Kim Jang-soo has made implementation of YRP a priority issue within the ministry, and he (Vice Minister Kim) has been given the primary responsibility for keeping that momentum going.

-- After visiting the Pyongtaek construction site, VM Kim determined more roads were needed to speed up the project. As a result, a 450-meter road into the Parcel 1 site has been completed and a square-shaped construction road within that site will now be built.

-- MND will "inject" an engineering battalion into the site

to complete the construction road as quickly as possible.

-- VM Kim will visit Pyongyang once a month for the next six months to personally assess the progress and to help resolve any problems that arise.

13. (C) Turning to the issue of the removal of occupants that remain on the land, VM Kim said there were 59 households left and that the ROK government's goal was to move them to a new location in March. He said some of the occupants were very attached to the land because they had farmed it all their lives, but that the ROK's dialogue with them had been progressing in a favorable manner. He said the 9th round of dialogue between the government and the occupants would take place later in the day. Indicating that the previous eight rounds of negotiations had been difficult, Kim joked that the process was similar to the Six-Party Talks. (NOTE: On February 14, VM Kim phoned the POLMC with news that the 9th round of negotiations had indeed resulted in an agreement with all 59 households that they would relocate by March 31. The same day, MND issued a press release announcing the agreement to the public. END NOTE).

14. (C) Kim further revealed that the families had concluded in recent weeks that further politicization of their plight was no longer helping them in their talks with the ROK government. At that point they had shifted their focus to getting adequate support from the government for their relocation needs, Kim explained. He said the households would first move to temporary apartments in the Pyongyang area, then to their permanent relocation area at a future date.

15. (C) VM Kim said the ROK Prime Minister planned to visit Pyongyang in conjunction with the relocation of the households and that President Roh Moo-hyun would participate in a ceremony to initiate construction on the new base sometime in September. Boasting of his own political connections and the usefulness of his network of interagency contacts, VM Kim explained that his relationship with the mayor in Pyongyang and other local leaders would greatly assist his efforts to move the YRP project forward. He also pointed to his own planning and finance background as further assets in his current assignment.

16. (C) The Ambassador thanked MND for taking ownership of the issue and thanked VM Kim for his direct involvement in moving the project forward. He said it was the U.S. Government's hope that any delay in the YRP completion date would be minimized as much as possible. He pointed out that the net return of land to the Korean people that would result from completion of USFK's transformation made it a win-win situation for U.S.-ROK relations. The Ambassador and Vice Minister Kim agreed on the importance of resolving, and thereby depoliticizing, contentious U.S.-ROK Alliance issues before they become lightning rods in the 2007 ROK Presidential election. Kim cited the additional motivation that positive momentum and the avoidance of negative press on Alliance matters would give the Defense Minister a strong hand in the ROK interagency process. To further elevate his minister's stature, VM requested the Ambassador's help in arranging meetings with other high-level U.S. government officials during the Minister's upcoming February 23 ministerial visit to Washington.

VERSHBOW